

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

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CAPE TOWN ALSO FOR EMBASSY

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PLAB, EINV, SHUM, SF
SUBJECT: NDMF WORK ADVANCEMENT CONFERENCE

1. SUMMARY: DURING A CONFERENCE ON WORK ADVANCEMENT SPONSORED BY THE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGEMENT FOUNDATION, WHICH WAS ATTENDED BY A NUMBER OF U.S. SUBSIDIARIES, SOUTH AFRICAN GOVERNMENT, BUSINESS, AND ACADEMIC SPOKESMEN EMPHASIZED BOTH THE OPPORTUNITIES AND THE NEED FOR TRAINING NON-WHITE WORKERS. THE HOLDING OF SUCH CONFERENCES ON AN INCREASINGLY FREQUENT BASIS IS AN INDICATION OF THE POSSIBILITIES FOR CHANGE IN THE WORK PLACE AND THE ANXIETIES WITHIN SOUTH AFRICA REGARDING THE CONSEQUENCES WHICH MAY RESULT IF CHANGE DOES NOT OCCUR AT A SUITABLE PACE.
END SUMMARY.

2. POINTING TO THE SKILLS SHORTAGE IN SOUTH AFRICA, MINISTER OF LABOR FANNIE BOTHA EXPRESSED CONCERN THAT
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THE PERCENTAGE OF COLORED AND BLACK JOURNEYMEN AND APPRENTICES DECLINED FROM 16.76 AND 2.54 RESPECTIVELY, IN 1975 TO 16.3 AND 2.13 IN 1977. IN URGING BUSINESSMEN TO UPGRADE THE SKILLS OF THEIR NON-WHITE EMPLOYEES, HE EMPHASIZED THAT "THE GOVERNMENT DOES NOT STAND IN THE WAY OF CHANGING WORK PATTERNS WHICH WOULD ALLOW NON-WHITES TO MOVE UP INTO JOB CATEGORIES WHICH REQUIRE

HIGHER SKILLS...PROVIDED THESE CHANGES COME ABOUT
IN AN ORDERLY FASHION AND WITH THE CONCURRENCE OF THE
TRADE UNIONS".

3. PROFESSOR BLACKIE SWART OF THE INSTITUTE OF LABOR
RELATIONS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA SAID THAT
HIS RESEARCH FINDINGS INDICATE THAT LOW BLACK EDUCA-
TIONAL STANDARDS ARE LARGELY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE BLACK-
WHITE WAGE GAP. NDMF EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR P.W. PENZHORN
WAS CRITICAL OF THE LOW SKILLS RATIO IN SOUTH AFRICA.
"NEARLY 40 PERCENT OF OUR LABOR FORCE IS UNSKILLED AS AGAINST
13 PERCENT IN THE UNITED STATES AND 5.5 PERCENT IN
AUSTRALIA.

4. A SPOKESMAN FOR SOUTH AFRICA RAILWAYS NOTED THAT
IN THE PAST SEVEN YEARS 23,000 NON-WHITES HAVE BEEN
EMPLOYED IN JOBS TRADITIONALLY RESERVED FOR WHITES.
HE ADMITTED BLACKS MOVING INTO TRADITIONALLY WHITE
JOBS RECEIVE BETWEEN 70 AND 75 PERCENT OF WHITE
SALARIES BUT SAID IT IS THE POLICY OF THE RAILWAYS TO
NARROW THE WAGE GAP. HE SAID THE BLACK ADVANCEMENT
WAS BEING DONE IN COOPERATION WITH THE WHITE UNIONS
WHO ARE ALSO TRAINING BLACK LOCOMOTIVE ENGINEERS FOR THE
TRANSKEI AND NAMIBIA.

5. IN A PAPER WHICH WAS READ FOR HIM, URBAN FOUNDATION
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DIRECTOR JUSTICE STEYN URGED SOUTH AFRICAN EMPLOYERS
TO ADHERE TO THE FOUNDATION'S CODE OF EMPLOYMENT PRACTICE
AND REPORT BACK ON PROGRESS IN IMPLEMENTATION. HE
SAID THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY HAD A RESPONSIBILITY TO
ENCOURAGE CHANGE IN SOUTH AFRICAN SOCIETY AS A WHOLE BY
INFORMING THE PUBLIC OF PROGRESS.

6. COMMENT: SOUTH AFRICA APPEARS, AT TIMES, TO BE SUFFER-
ING FROM CONFERENCE-ITIS. THE SENSE OF URGENCY WHICH
IS REFLECTED IN THE OBSERVATIONS OF GOVERNMENT, BUSINESS
AND EVEN WHITE TRADE UNION SPOKESMEN AT SUCH MEETINGS
LEAVES INCREASINGLY FEWER PRETEXTS FOR EMPLOYERS TO
PRACTICE DISCRIMINATION. THERE SEEMS TO BE A GROWING
CONVICTION THAT CODES OF EMPLOYMENT PRACTICE, IF EN-
FORCED AND MONITORED, ARE PREFERABLE TO THE THREAT OF
ECONOMIC SANCTIONS AND BOYCOTTS.
JOHNSON

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